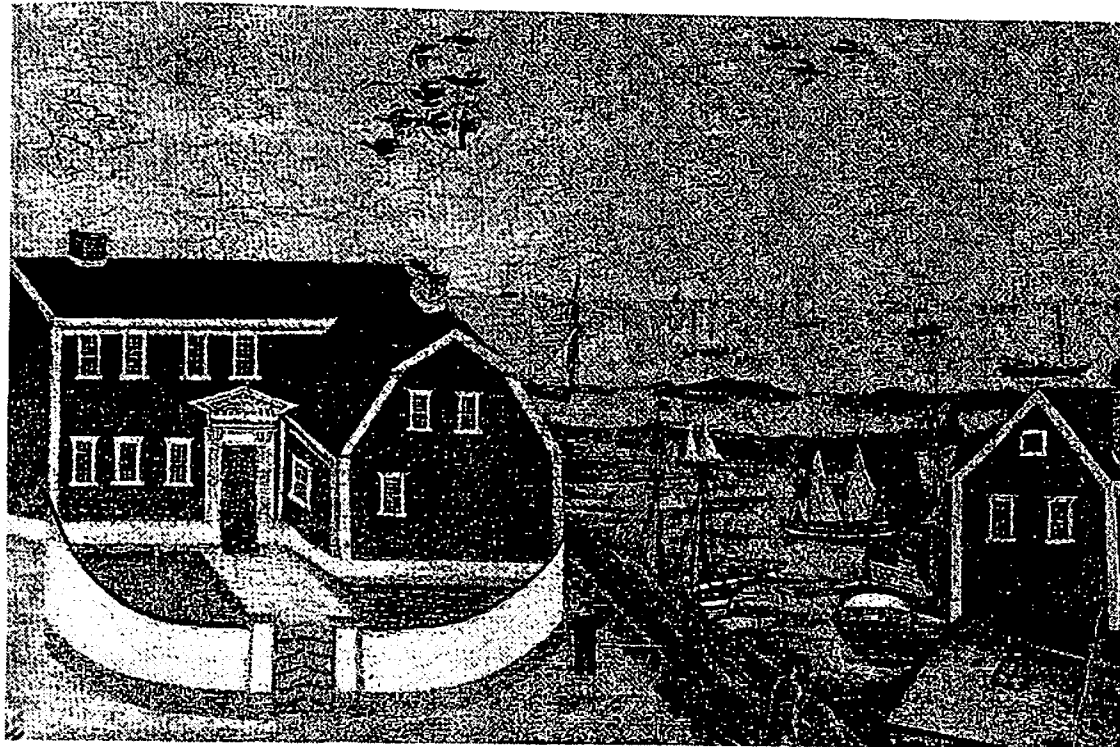


"PRESERVING A DUXBURY HERITAGE"

By Wm. Lord McKinney, Curator Duxbury Rural & Historical Society

Thursday, May 13, 1965



(This is the first of a series of five articles to appear in the Duxbury Clipper preliminary to the campaign "Preserving a Duxbury Heritage.")

OVER A CENTURY AGO the then Governor Edward Everett in an address commemorating the landing of the Pilgrims on these shores said, in one of his inspired periods, that Cape Cod extended its reach into the troubled waters of the Atlantic like the hand of God bidding the Pilgrims gracious welcome.

During the centuries that followed the landing of the Pilgrims, their descendants, plus a glorious company of kindred spirits, have kept faith with the inheritance which was theirs. Perhaps this dedication was nowhere so evident as in the shipping industry, where the labor of their hands, the nobility of the hearts and the keenness of their minds served to create such a glorious heritage.

The above picture is from a painting by Dr. Rufus Hathaway, probably late 18th century, of the Joshua Winsor home and the Duxbury shore. The salt house, where the local fishermen brought their cod to be cured, is to the right in the picture. According to the writings of Jerusha F. Hathaway, "This salt fish found a market in England as well as in distant parts of our own country, much of it being disposed of in southern ports, and the business was very profitable. Capt. Joshua Winsor once sent to England, with his cargo of fish, a box of broken fish, for the benefit of each of his daughters, the proceeds purchasing for one her silk wedding gown, and for another, among other things, a curious ring, still in the family and prized as a relic of the Duxbury girl of 114 years ago." Some remains of the two Winsor wharves may be seen today at low tide, just north of the Yacht Club. Laurence Bradford lists 14 Captains or commanders of ships of the name of Winsor. Winsor was but one of the illustrious names in the shipping industry here.

Quoting Hathaway again, "Shipbuilding began in Duxbury about 1719. The first shipyard was established at the Nook by Thomas Prince, and here the first vessel was built. This was a sloop and the wood used in its construction was mostly wild cherry, which was found to be durable for such work. The first large vessels were built in the yard of Samuel Winsor, on the Nook shore at the foot of Captain's Hill. Mr. Winsor had previously built several vessels on the south end of Clark's Island. Other yards were soon established until in 1800, and later on, they stretched along the shore from the Nook to Powder Point, and there were several beside, on Blue Fish River and the Mill Pond. These were the days of Duxbury's greatest activity. The street was thronged with workmen at morning, noon and night, and the ox teams slowly passed along, bringing from Plympton, Carver and other towns, their loads of logs and timber for mast and keel. The sound of the mallets began with the sun, the air was filled with the smell of boiling tar, and the deep sand of the road was hidden beneath a layer of large and fragrant chips, on which many a housewife depended to kindle her kitchen fire. The Duxbury ships were noted for their fine model and excellent construction."

This picture of the Winsor House was on the cover of the Bulletin of the Society For the Preservation of New England Antiquities, Fall of 1952, in which our esteemed local historian, Gershom Bradford, gives an interesting account of the career of Captain Gamaliel Bradford, one of the half dozen sea Captains of the Bradford name.

Following a distinguished career in the Army, "Bradford was undecided as to his life's work. He finally chose a seafaring future. This was a natural choice for his home town was steeped in salt." On March 4, 1797, Gamaliel Bradford became master of the brigantine WILLIAM. By this time his abilities were widely recognized, as evidenced by the conspicuous compliment of being offered command of the frigate BOSTON by President Adams.

On March 7, 1824 Captain Bradford died but later his name was destined to ride the seas. In 1935 President Roosevelt was authorized by Congress to publish all data of the little publicized Quasi-War with France. Several pages in the report were given to the actions fought by Gamaliel Bradford and not long after a powerful destroyer (DD 545) slid down the ways of San Diego bearing the name of Bradford for Captain Gamaliel.

(The second in this series will appear in the next issue of the Duxbury Clipper.)